



Dr. Cynthia Ostberg

Pacific Launches Honors Program To Prepare Students For Law Careers

By Cynthia Kincaid

A new honors program for future legal and community leaders will begin this fall at the University of the Pacific, which will prepare high-caliber students to make the transition to McGeorge School of Law. The Pacific Legal Scholars Program will provide undergraduate students with a personalized student-centered legal experience, allowing them to complete their bachelor's and law degrees in either six or the traditional seven years.

"My goal is to try and prepare students for that first year of law school, so that they can excel instead of just trying to survive," says Dr. Cynthia Ostberg, director of the Pacific Legal Scholars Program. "The first year of law school is the most arduous, and if you have certain skills under your belt, you'll be much better prepared than a lot of other students coming in."

The Legal Scholars program will give undergraduate students pre-professional learning opportunities, with law faculty and leaders of the legal profession, so as to better prepare them for their law careers. "We want to make sure that students get a strong liberal arts education in [an undergraduate program]," says Ostberg. "We are looking for creative individuals who are interested in pursuing the law, have a vision, and show leadership capabilities."

In the summer of their third undergraduate year, students will take a one-week crash course in legal writing from the director of the legal writing program at Pacific McGeorge. "The more practice they have with legal writing, the better they're going to be," Ostberg says. Students will also become familiar with the law library and receive legal research instruction. We want to get them acclimated [to legal writing and the law library] before they enter their first year of law school," says Ostberg.

During their senior undergraduate year, students in the program will take a set of pre-designed law classes as electives, which "are designed to provide basic skills that will help students once they get to their first year of law school," says Ostberg.

The first class, held in the fall, according to Ostberg, will expose students to the philosophy of the law, discuss the

court system, and then have students read case law as a way to begin to learn legal language. "There will also be guest speakers from Pacific McGeorge who will give presentations in various areas of the law," Ostberg says.

"In the spring semester, I will still be doing some of the same skill building, but I also want students to think more coherently about what kind of law they might want to practice," she says. Guest speakers will discuss their experience as lawyers and how they entered their field. "They will get insights from people who are practicing out in the legal field," says Ostberg. "We are also hoping to have Pacific alumni come back and talk to them as well, so there will be interaction with alums."

As undergraduates, students in the program will also participate in five law-related activities off campus, including lectures and mock trials. Once in law school, students can participate in the fraternal organization, Phi Alpha Delta, or get involved in internships. The Community Legal Services clinic also exposes students to real-world, hands-on training in a variety of legal fields for 1,400 clients each year.

The Legal Scholars program, which hopes to have 10-15 students enrolled for Fall 2008, is an honors program; students cannot participate unless they meet honors requirements. This includes a 3.5 GPA and 1250 to 1320 on the SAT, depending on whether a student is in the 3+3 program or 4+3 program. A median score on the LSAT is also required. In 2007, that score reached 158. Provided they meet the requirements and succeed in the program, students are guaranteed admission to Pacific McGeorge upon graduation from their undergraduate program.

Once students go through the Legal Scholars program, says Ostberg, they will be uniquely prepared to attend McGeorge School of Law, or any other law school. "Ideally, we would want the students to go to Pacific McGeorge, but they don't have to," she says. "I am interested in preparing students for whatever law school they choose. That's the goal."

She adds: "I want them to be able to hit the ground running and take the most advantage of law school that they can."